

The Paradox of Continuance Commitment between Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Signs of Burnout

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Abstract: This study examines the paradox of continuance commitment among Moroccan middle managers (N = 220), who operate under intense hierarchical pressure and demanding performance objectives. It explores how different forms of organizational commitment relate to organizational citizenship behaviors and early signs of burnout, while examining the mediating role of perceived social justice and empowering leadership. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire including validated measures of commitment, burnout, and citizenship behaviors, and analyzed using SPSS. Results show that continuance commitment is predominant, whereas affective and normative commitment remain weak. This pattern reflects constrained attachment associated with labor market conditions and is correlated with latent symptoms of burnout. Findings also demonstrate that perceived social justice and empowering leadership significantly mediate the relationship, enabling constrained commitment to evolve into more voluntary involvement and enhancing citizenship behaviors. The study highlights that high levels of continuance commitment should not be mistaken for genuine engagement. From a managerial perspective, organizations should strengthen fairness and adopt empowering leadership practices to reduce the risks of stress, disengagement, and resignation among operational managers. This research contributes to the literature by linking continuance commitment, burnout, and organizational citizenship behaviors in a non-Western context, highlighting the critical role of social justice and leadership as mediators.

Keywords: *Organizational commitment, Organizational citizenship behaviors, Burnout, Leadership, Social justice.*

1. Introduction

In a context of accelerating organizational transformations, the question of work commitment—and its potential negative consequences, such as burnout has become central in human resource management. While organizational commitment is often portrayed as a driver of performance, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), recent studies emphasize its ambivalent nature: in certain contexts, commitment can prove emotionally costly and detrimental to well-being. This paradox is particularly acute in constrained environments, where attachment to the organization is rooted less in affective identification than in necessity or obligation.

The international literature has refined the definitions, typologies, and measurement instruments for commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), while integrating insights from burnout research (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Demerouti et al., 2001). Although often conceptualized as opposite constructs, organizational commitment and burnout can overlap in practice. In emerging economies, continuance and normative commitment anchored in obligation or lack of alternatives—may coexist with psychological exhaustion, blurring the boundaries between sustainable engagement and overinvestment.

Yet, existing research has paid limited attention to the mechanisms that may mitigate this paradox. Recent work highlights the role of contextual factors such as perceived organizational justice and empowering leadership, which can transform constrained commitment into more voluntary and sustainable involvement (Colquitt et al., 2021; Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). However, empirical evidence remains scarce in non-Western contexts, particularly in North Africa, where labor markets are characterized by precarious mobility and strong hierarchical dynamics.

This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the paradox of continuance commitment among Moroccan middle managers and operational employees. It does not aim to directly measure burnout using classical scales, but rather to identify signs of latent distress through responses to engagement-related questions that partially

overlap with certain burnout indicators. The objective is to examine how constrained attachment, while fostering expected organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), may also be associated with implicit manifestations of discomfort. In addition, the study explores the mediating role of social justice and empowering leadership, which may alleviate this phenomenon and transform constraint-based commitment into more sustainable involvement.

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following central question:

To what extent can organizational commitment based on constraint and loyalty generate positive outcomes in terms of citizenship behaviors, while concealing latent distress likely to undermine employees' psychological health and long-term performance?

2. Literature Review

This study draws on a theoretical framework structured around three core dimensions: organizational commitment in its affective, normative, and continuance forms; organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) recontextualized within Moroccan cultural specificities; and two key mediating levers—leadership and social justice. By articulating these elements, our objective is to better understand the drivers of middle managers' involvement in environments where recognition, fairness, and managerial quality are critical. The following sections present a review of existing research, the formulation of hypotheses, and the proposed research model.

“Performance-Enhancing” Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

In his multifactorial model of performance, Campbell (1990) emphasizes that performance extends beyond task proficiency. It also includes behaviors such as rule compliance, punctuality, attendance, and the ability to foster cooperation among colleagues. This perspective aligns with Borman and Motowidlo's (1993) concept of contextual performance—actions undertaken beyond formal job requirements, driven by discretionary effort. Examples include voluntarily assisting overburdened colleagues, adhering to organizational rules even in disagreement, or personally investing time to advance organizational objectives.

The notion of OCB is closely linked to the “willingness to cooperate” (Katz, 1964), particularly through spontaneous, proactive, and innovative behaviors. The concept was formalized in the early 1980s by Organ and collaborators (Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ & Near, 1983; Bateman & Organ, 1983), who defined OCB as discretionary actions not mandated by formal contracts nor penalized in their absence, yet contributing significantly to organizational effectiveness. Organ (1988) identifies several dimensions of OCB:

- Altruism: Voluntarily helping a colleague facing workload pressure.
- Conscientiousness: Rigorously following organizational procedures, such as safety protocols, even without supervision.
- Civic virtue: Active participation in company events or committees aimed at organizational improvement.
- Courtesy: Informing colleagues in advance of delays to prevent disruption.
- Sportsmanship: Accepting inconveniences, such as schedule changes, without complaint.

Podsakoff, Ahearne, and MacKenzie (1997) argue that sportsmanship boosts group morale and reduces turnover, while courtesy mitigates intergroup conflict (Paillé, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Civic virtue reflects strong organizational attachment and a willingness to engage in organizational projects (Graham, 1991). Paillé (2007) classifies OCB into two categories: (1) individual-oriented behaviors (altruism, cooperation, courtesy) and (2) organization-oriented behaviors (compliance, sportsmanship, civic virtue). His study in a French context found that employees exhibit both types of behaviors, although team spirit-related behaviors are not always the most salient, and that affective commitment is not systematically linked to OCB attributes.

Although OCB is recognized as a multidimensional construct, there is no consensus regarding the universality of its attributes, suggesting that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping its expression.

Commitment and Its Different Forms

Organizational commitment is defined by Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) as an employee's identification with and involvement in the organization, reflected in loyalty, willingness to exert effort, and desire to remain. Committed employees align with organizational values, seek career progression within the firm, and go beyond role requirements. Meyer and Allen (1991) refined this definition by proposing a three-dimensional model:

- Affective commitment – Emotional attachment and value alignment; the employee remains because they want to.
- Continuance commitment – Calculative attachment based on perceived costs of leaving; the employee stays because they have to.
- Normative commitment – Obligation-driven attachment rooted in moral or social duty; the employee remains because they ought to.

Despite extensive global research, organizational commitment remains underexplored in Morocco. A study of 75 public-sector employees by Côme and Yassine (2015) found that certain managerial practices enhance affective attachment, positively impacting performance. Affective and normative commitments were significantly correlated with performance, whereas continuance commitment was not—a result likely explained by the job stability inherent to Morocco's public sector.

Qualitative research by Akhlaffou, El Wazani, and Souaf (2017) identified trust as a critical lever of productive behavior. Ait Alla and Rajaa (2018) reported a correlation between organizational involvement and factors such as skill development and working conditions, though without distinguishing between commitment types. Overall, the limited available studies suggest that affective commitment is the most influential dimension for employee performance in Morocco, with calculative and normative forms playing secondary roles.

Mediating Factors: Leadership and Social Justice (enriched)

Leadership: Leadership is a central mechanism shaping the relationship between commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. Burns (1978) defines leadership as an influence process rooted in moral values, aimed at fostering profound and lasting change. Bass (1985) extended this perspective through transformational leadership, which inspires employees to exceed formal job requirements by promoting vision, empowerment, and individualized support. Transformational leaders influence discretionary behaviors such as OCB by fostering motivation, emotional attachment, and a sense of purpose (Neveu, 2004; Saint-Michel & Wielhorski, 2011).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Scandura & Graen, 1984) further highlights the importance of high-quality dyadic relationships. In LMX, leaders provide resources, recognition, and developmental opportunities, which strengthen trust and commitment. Empirical studies show that LMX quality positively correlates with affective commitment and OCB, while reducing turnover intentions (Hui et al., 2013; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Lowe et al., 2013). Recent research in North African and Middle Eastern contexts (Ben Hassen et al., 2022; El Idrissi, 2023) indicates that leaders who combine transformational behaviors with fairness and empowerment are more likely to encourage voluntary cooperation, even in environments where employees' commitment is primarily constrained by necessity.

Leadership can therefore mediate the link between all forms of commitment and OCB:

- Affective commitment may be reinforced by inspirational and supportive leadership.
- Continuance commitment can be guided toward positive discretionary behaviors when leaders provide recognition and structured support.
- Normative commitment may translate into citizenship behaviors when leaders emphasize ethical values and social responsibility.

Hypotheses

H1: Affective commitment, mediated by leadership, predicts OCB

H2: Continuance commitment, mediated by leadership, predicts OCB

H3: Normative commitment, mediated by leadership, predicts OCB

Social Justice: Perceived organizational justice is another critical mediator in the commitment-OCB-OCB relationship. Equity theory (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1958) suggests that employees evaluate the fairness of organizational practices by comparing their inputs (effort, skills) to outcomes (rewards, recognition). Perceived imbalances may generate dissatisfaction, withdrawal behaviors, or reduced discretionary effort. Conversely, perceived fairness enhances engagement and discretionary behaviors such as OCB (Moorman, 1991; Organ, 1988; Colquitt et al., 2021).

Organizational justice is commonly conceptualized in three dimensions (Cropanzano et al., 2003):

- Distributive justice – fairness in the allocation of outcomes such as promotions, pay, or recognition,
- Procedural justice – fairness in decision-making processes, transparency, and consistency,
- Interactional justice – quality of interpersonal treatment, respect, and communication from supervisors.

Recent studies in Moroccan and North African contexts (El Idrissi, 2023; Ben Hassen et al., 2022) demonstrate that perceptions of justice strongly influence both affective and normative commitment. Employees who perceive high fairness are more willing to invest discretionary effort, help colleagues, and engage in organizational projects beyond their formal roles. Justice can also transform constrained continuance commitment into voluntary prosocial behaviors, mitigating the risk of latent burnout and disengagement.

Hypotheses

H4: Affective commitment, mediated by social justice, predicts OCB

H5: Continuance commitment, mediated by social justice, predicts OCB

H6: Normative commitment, mediated by social justice, predicts OCB

Burnout Measurement Tools and Conceptual Linkages with Commitment

Although this study does not directly focus on burnout, certain items from established burnout measurement tools provide valuable insights into the potential psychological strain associated with different commitment profiles. Burnout, as conceptualized by Maslach and Jackson (1981), is a response to chronic workplace stress and is typically assessed across three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) remains a widely used reference, despite some sector-specific limitations (Shirom, 2003).

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), developed by Demerouti et al. (2001), extends the assessment to two general dimensions—exhaustion and disengagement—and incorporates both positively and negatively worded items. In the present study, these instruments serve as conceptual reference points to interpret certain patterns observed in the commitment measures derived from the Meyer and Allen (1991) scale.

Cross-analysis reveals conceptual proximity between some continuance commitment items and indicators of exhaustion, suggesting that employees exhibiting a dominant continuance commitment combined with low affective and normative commitment may be experiencing latent psychological strain. This approach allows the study to acknowledge the potential negative consequences of constrained commitment without framing burnout as a measured outcome.

H7: Continuance commitment, when not counterbalanced by substantial affective or normative commitment, is associated with indicators of latent psychological strain.

3. Methodology

Research objectives and strategy

This study aims to examine the dynamics between organizational commitment, perceived social justice, leadership, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) in Moroccan organizations. Beyond a linear reading of these relationships, the objective is to capture the complexity of different forms of commitment— affective, normative, or continuance—and to analyze whether they reflect authentic engagement or, conversely, constrained and ambivalent loyalty.

Special attention is given to the transferability of classical OCB dimensions, initially conceptualized in North American contexts (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000), to the Moroccan environment. Through consultation

with HR directors, additional context-specific attributes—such as compliance and hierarchical obedience—were identified and integrated into the model.

The empirical strategy combines quantitative rigor with contextual sensitivity: internationally validated measurement instruments were linguistically and culturally adapted, and the research design explicitly considered cultural, religious, and organizational specificities (e.g., hierarchical norms, the Ramadan period).

Sample and procedure

The empirical study was conducted with 220 middle managers and operational employees from Moroccan organizations, drawn from an initial pool of 300 potential respondents (response rate of 74%). The sample was deliberately limited to large private and semi-public companies operating in sectors such as energy, mining, finance, and insurance. These organizations were selected because they rely on formalized HR systems (performance evaluations, structured career paths), offering more reliable conditions for studying commitment and citizenship behaviors.

SMEs were excluded due to their often-informal practices and limited capacity to institutionalize HR policies, which could have introduced difficult-to-control variability.

Participants were middle managers with at least ten years of experience and supervisory responsibilities—a particularly relevant group as they are both subject to hierarchical expectations and responsible for mobilizing discretionary behaviors in their teams.

Data collection was carried out mainly through paper questionnaires administered between September and December 2024. Follow-up phone calls were made to clarify ambiguous responses, especially those related to the translation of certain items into Arabic, ensuring semantic accuracy. The pace of data collection slowed during Ramadan, a factor that was integrated into the survey schedule. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, ensuring confidentiality, reducing social desirability bias, and strengthening data reliability.

Measurement instruments

To test the research model, we used internationally validated scales adapted to the Moroccan context, both linguistically and culturally. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Reliability analyses produced satisfactory results, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.89 across the scales.

Organizational commitment: Organizational commitment was measured using the short version of Meyer and Allen's (1990) scale, adapted by Iverson and Buttigieg (1999). This 12-item instrument captures the three classical dimensions: Affective commitment (emotional attachment to the organization), normative commitment (moral obligation to remain) and continuance commitment (cost-benefit rationale for remaining in the organization).

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB): OCB was measured with a multidimensional scale adapted from Organ (1988), Podsakoff et al. (2000), and Paillé (2007). After validation by a panel of seven Moroccan HR directors, additional culturally relevant items were incorporated, leading to six key attributes:

- Altruism
- Conscientiousness
- Civic virtue
- Courtesy
- Sportsmanship
- Compliance / hierarchical obedience (specific to the Moroccan context).

The inclusion of compliance reflects Moroccan organizational norms, shaped by culture, religion, and colonial heritage, where “good citizenship” is often associated with loyalty and obedience to authority rather than discretionary initiative. The final scale included 28 items (24 from Podsakoff's model and 4 new items linked to compliance).

Perceived social justice: Perceived organizational justice was measured using a 10-item adapted version of Moorman's (1991) questionnaire, covering three dimensions: Distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes) and interactional justice (quality of interpersonal treatment)

The measure was translated into French and Arabic, with special attention to semantic nuances (e.g., "justice" vs. "equity") to ensure better cultural validity.

Leadership: Leadership was measured using the LMX (Leader–Member Exchange) scale developed by Scandura and Graen (1984). This six-item scale evaluates the quality of the leader–subordinate relationship, including trust, recognition, support, and reciprocity. The instrument was chosen for its conciseness and relevance in hierarchical contexts, where relational quality often outweighs formal empowerment.

Data analysis

All calculations were performed using SPSS. The analyses identified plausible links between the different forms of organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors, while also verifying the relevance of contextualizing Morgan's OCB model, which is based on five attributes. Mediation effects were also computed and summarized to facilitate the readability and interpretation of the results. Finally, the reliability of the measures was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.72, which is considered acceptable for this study.

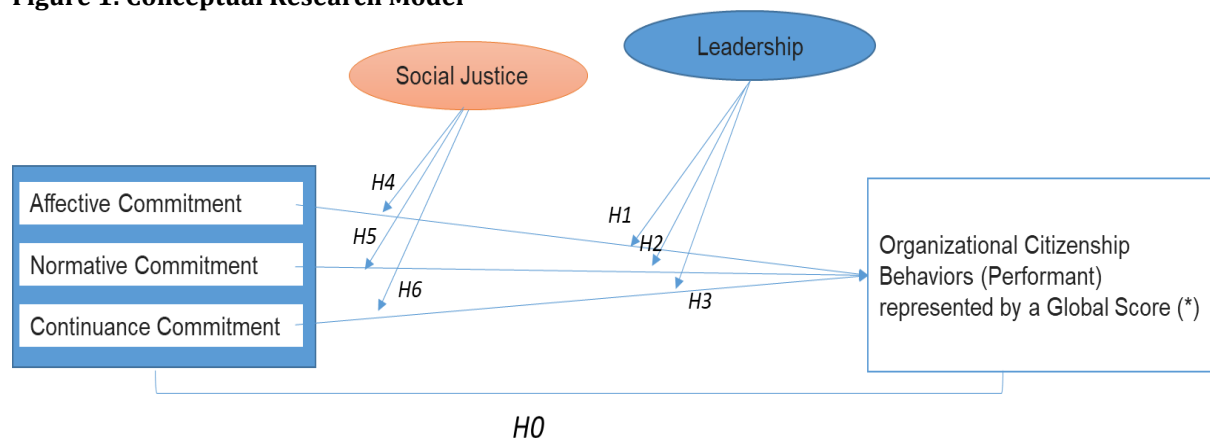
Conceptual research model

The proposed model (see Figure 1) postulates that:

- Organizational commitment (affective, normative, continuance) positively influences organizational citizenship behaviors.
- Leadership and perceived social justice act as mediators, shaping both the intensity and nature of this influence.
- Continuance commitment, though functional, may produce ambiguous effects on OCB.

By integrating both classical theories and context-specific adaptations, this methodological framework offers a nuanced and culturally grounded perspective on organizational dynamics in Morocco.

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model



(*) The six attributes retained for this study are: Professionalism, Conformity, Consideration, Tolerance, Altruism, and Civic Spirit

Source: Author

4. Findings

The literature emphasizes a strong link between organizational commitment and discretionary, high-performing behaviors. Our study confirms this connection within the Moroccan context, while highlighting its specific characteristics and the mediating roles of leadership and social justice.

Commitment and High-Performing Behaviors

Initial analyses show that organizational commitment significantly predicts citizenship behaviors among Moroccan middle managers and operational staff. Correlation coefficients are notable, particularly for affective commitment (.337, $p = .000$) and continuance commitment (.458, $p = .000$), a stronger effect than observed in classical studies such as Organ (1988). This finding underscores the relevance of contextualizing the OCB construct, especially in environments where hierarchical obedience, cultural norms, and structural constraints shape employee behavior.

Interestingly, continuance commitment emerged as the strongest predictor, surpassing affective commitment. This contrasts with classical Western findings (Allen & Meyer, 1990) but aligns with recent studies in emerging economies (e.g., Singh et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023), where constrained labor markets and job insecurity enhance the behavioral impact of calculative attachment. In Morocco, operational employees—often technicians or supervisors—may demonstrate high commitment out of necessity rather than voluntary engagement.

Respondents report elevated levels of professionalism, altruism, civic virtue, courtesy, sportsmanship, and conformity, with conformity reflecting a cultural and historical expectation of hierarchical obedience. These results confirm the importance of including context-specific OCB attributes, as suggested by Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010) and recent MENA studies (El Idrissi et al., 2024).

The results can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Correlation Matrices (Source: SPSS)
Corrélations

		Affective OCB Index	Continuance OCB Index	Normative OCB Index	Contextualized Global Score	Global Score According to Morgan's CI
Affective OCB Index	Pearson Correlation	1	,438**	0,008	,337**	,243**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,906	0,000	0,000
	N	220	220	220	220	220
Continuance OCB Index	Pearson Correlation	,438**	1	-,164*	,458**	,410**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,015	0,000	0,000
	N	220	220	220	220	220
Normative OCB Index	Pearson Correlation	0,008	-,164*	1	0,035	-,159*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,906	0,015		0,606	0,019
	N	220	220	220	220	220
Contextualized Global Score	Pearson Correlation	,337**	,458**	0,035	1	,721**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,606		0,000
	N	220	220	220	220	220
Global Score According to Morgan's CI	Pearson Correlation	,243**	,410**	-,159*	,721**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,019	0,000	
	N	220	220	220	220	220

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Following this, a separate mediation analysis was conducted for each of the two factors (social justice and leadership) across each form of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative (insignificant links are not presented).

Table 2: Summary of Results on the Mediating Effects of Social Justice and Leadership on the Commitment-High-Performing Behaviors Link (SPSS)

Calculations confirming the mediation effects (**)							
Variable X	Variable Y	Effect of X on Y	Mediation variable M	c (Overall effect)	c' (Direct effect)	Coefficient a (Effect of X on M)	Coefficient b (Effect of M on Y)
Affective commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Confirmed	Social Justice	c=.302 sig .019	c'=.112 sig .079	a=.412 sig .000	b=.461 sig .000
Affective commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Confirmed	Leadership	c=.302 sig .019	c'=.150 sig .019	a=.376 sig .000	b=.403 sig .000
Continuance commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Confirmed	Social Justice	c=.358 sig .000	c'=.267 sig .000	a=.226 sig .000	b=.405 sig .000
Continuance commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Confirmed	Leadership	c=.358 sig .000	c'=.280 sig .000	a=.217 sig .000	b=.360 sig .000
Normative commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Insufficient link	Social Justice	NS (c=.038 sig .606)		Absence of significant link	
Normative commitment	Performing behaviors (of citizenship)	Insufficient link	Leadership	NS (c=.038 sig .606)		Absence of significant link	

(*) Calculated based on the measurements of the six attributes: professionalism, conformity, consideration, tolerance, altruism, and civic-mindedness.

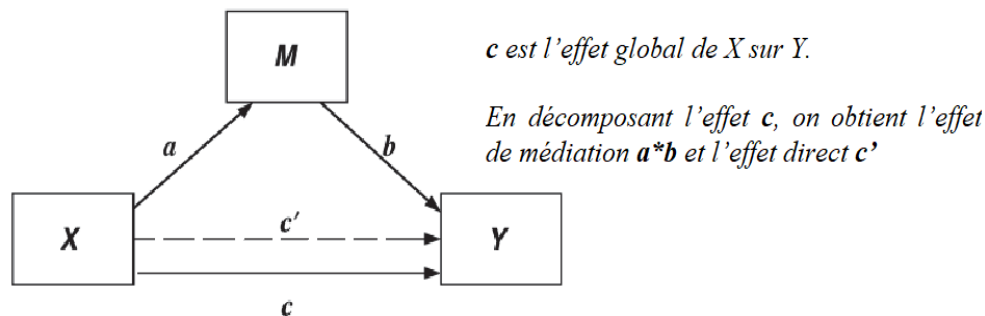
(**) Summary of calculations obtained from SPSS

Mediation Results of Social Justice and Leadership, with Additional Analysis on Burnout

Principles of Mediation: Definition and Methodological Approach

Before presenting empirical results, it is important to recall that the mediating effect of a variable (M) on the relationship between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y) is a frequent subject of study in management sciences. This mechanism, also called the indirect effect, refers to the idea that a mediator transmits the influence of X on Y (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, 2012; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). In the explanatory diagram below, this effect is represented by the product of coefficients a and b (i.e., $a*b$), corresponding respectively to the effect of X on M, then M on Y. A mediation effect is established when the total effect (c) is significantly reduced after introducing the mediator—that is, when the direct effect (c') becomes smaller than the total effect. The results obtained not only confirm the presence of a mediation effect but also quantify its magnitude.

Figure 2: Definition of Mediation Effect According to Preacher and Hayes (2004)



In accordance with our theoretical model (see Figure 2), the analysis decomposes the total effect of affective commitment on citizenship behaviors, which includes the potential influence of mediating variables, into two components:

c' : the direct effect, obtained while controlling for the influence of mediators;

$a*b$: the indirect effect, reflecting the mediation pathway, estimated as the product of coefficients (link between commitment and mediator) and (link between mediator and citizenship behaviors).

Empirical results are as follows (see Table 2 summary above):

Findings of the Mediation Analysis

Mediation analyses reveal nuanced mechanisms by which commitment translates into citizenship behaviors. Following Baron & Kenny (1986) and Preacher & Hayes (2004), direct and indirect effects were estimated using SPSS, showing both full and partial mediation patterns.

Affective commitment: When introducing social justice as a mediator, the direct effect of affective commitment on citizenship behaviors becomes non-significant ($c' = .289$, $p = .079$), indicating full mediation. Conversely, leadership partially mediates this relationship ($c' = .150$, $p = .019$). These results suggest that operational employees, who are less frequently in direct contact with supervisors, respond more strongly to tangible fairness and equity in HR practices than to leadership alone.

Continuance commitment: For this form of commitment, both social justice and leadership partially mediate its effect on OCB. Direct effects remain significant after accounting for mediators ($c' = .267$ for social justice; $c' = .280$ for leadership, both $p < .001$), while indirect effects are also significant (ab for social justice = $.226 * .405$; ab for leadership = $.217 * .360$). These results highlight that even “necessity-driven” commitment can translate into discretionary behaviors when organizational policies are perceived as fair and managers provide support, consistent with studies on constrained labor markets (e.g., Khamis & Abdelkafi, 2021).

In the Moroccan context, particularly among middle managers and technicians, continuance commitment serves as a strategy for job security, yet organizational mechanisms such as procedural justice, equitable rewards, and supportive leadership can channel this commitment into positive behaviors. These findings align

with Podsakoff et al. (2000) and recent research in MENA countries, showing that organizational conditions moderate the translation of calculative attachment into prosocial behavior.

Additional Analysis on Burnout

While this study does not directly measure burnout, a cross-analysis of commitment items and burnout scales (MBI, OLBI) suggests the potential for latent professional strain. Specifically, dominant continuance commitment combined with low affective and normative commitment appears linked to psychological distress markers, such as emotional exhaustion or reduced personal accomplishment.

This pattern signals that high overall commitment, particularly in its continuance form, may mask underlying weariness. Employees may comply and demonstrate OCB out of obligation, fear of losing their position, or lack of alternatives, rather than genuine engagement. This observation resonates with contemporary literature highlighting the double-edged nature of commitment in constrained contexts (Nguyen et al., 2022; Al-Harthi & Al-Shaikh, 2023).

Comparison with engagement items reveals conceptual proximity to burnout indicators (see Table 3): statements such as “I feel like part of the family” or “I consider the organization’s problems as my own” may simultaneously reflect loyalty and risk of emotional overload. Correlation analyses confirm that continuance commitment predominates, roughly twice as influential as affective commitment, while normative commitment is largely insignificant. These findings substantiate Hypothesis 7, suggesting that sustained, necessity-driven commitment can conceal professional suffering if not supported by affective and normative dimensions.

Hence, our results emphasize the importance of disaggregating commitment dimensions and linking them to well-being indicators. This approach allows managers to detect silent distress, prevent latent burnout, and adjust HR policies accordingly, a crucial insight for organizations in emerging economies with hierarchical and culturally influenced structures.

Table 3: Engagement vs. Burnout — Comparison of Measurement Items.

Dimensions	Typical Engagement Questions (Affective / Normative)	Typical Burnout Questions (MBI / OLBI)	Comments on the Overlap
Affective Engagement	I feel emotionally attached to this organization.	I feel emotionally drained by my work. (MBI)	Strong emotional investment, but risk of emotional exhaustion.
	I identify the organization’s problems as my own.	I feel very fatigued during work. (OLBI)	Strong identification can lead to emotional overload.
	I feel like part of a family in this organization..	I wake up tired at the thought of facing a new workday. (MBI)	Strong attachment vs. chronic fatigue..
Normative Engagement	Sometimes, I give so much that I neglect my own health.	I feel mentally and physically exhausted by my tasks. (OLBI)	Risk of overcommitment leading to burnout.
	I feel that I owe a lot to my organization.	I keep working even when I’m exhausted because I feel obliged. (interpretative)	A sense of obligation that can be experienced as a psychological constraint.
	Leaving this organization would go against my moral principles.	I feel disengaged because I no longer freely choose to stay. (interpretative)	Moral obligation vs. latent disengagement..
	I would stay even if I no longer find satisfaction at work.	I feel an increasing mental distance from my work. (MBI/OLBI)	“Duty-driven” engagement can mask real disengagement.
Emotional Overlap	I would stay out of loyalty, even if it’s difficult..	I treat some aspects of my work with cynicism or indifference. (MBI)	Conflicted loyalty may generate cynicism, a common burnout symptom.
	I feel a strong responsibility toward my organization.	I often feel emotionally tired from professional interactions. (MBI)	Strong moral responsibility can generate high emotional fatigue.
	I feel indebted to this organization for what it has given me.	I feel overwhelmed by the emotional load of my work. (OLBI)	A sense of obligation can become a factor of chronic stress.

Source: The author

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study, conducted among Moroccan middle managers in private and semi-public organizations, highlights a distinctive feature of organizational commitment in this context: continuance commitment largely predominates, while affective and normative commitment remain comparatively low. This pattern contrasts with classical findings in Western contexts (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Organ, 1988) and reflects local socio-economic constraints, such as job insecurity, limited professional mobility, and structural labor market rigidity (El Adraoui, 2025). Among operational employees—technicians and supervisors—commitment often manifests as a form of constrained attachment, driven more by necessity than voluntary engagement, whereas senior managers exhibit stronger affective and normative commitment.

Despite these constraints, employees demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) beyond formal role requirements. The addition of conformity as a culturally relevant OCB dimension, validated by a panel of HR directors, underscores the influence of Moroccan cultural specificities—including religious norms, hierarchical obedience, and colonial heritage—on workplace behavior. These findings support recent studies emphasizing the necessity of contextualizing classical engagement and OCB constructs in emerging economies (Singh et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023; Al-Harthy & Al-Shaikh, 2023).

The study further confirms the mediating roles of social justice and leadership in converting commitment into sustainable, high-performing behaviors. Social justice—through procedural fairness, equitable recognition, and transparent policies—emerges as a particularly effective lever for operational staff, while empowering leadership facilitates discretionary behaviors among middle and senior managers. These results align with recent research highlighting the critical interplay between managerial support, fairness, and engagement outcomes in non-Western contexts.

Importantly, a cross-analysis of engagement and burnout-related items reveals a latent risk: high continuance commitment, when not accompanied by sufficient affective or normative commitment, may mask psychological distress, including emotional exhaustion and disengagement. This finding stresses that global commitment scores can be misleading; managers need to deconstruct commitment into its dimensions and monitor potential signs of latent strain to prevent professional malaise and adapt HR practices accordingly (Nguyen et al., 2022; Al-Harthy & Al-Shaikh, 2023).

Practical implications of this study are clear: organizations in Morocco and similar contexts should implement engagement policies sensitive to local cultural and structural realities, prioritizing social justice, equitable HR practices, and humane leadership to balance performance and employee well-being. Policymakers and HR practitioners are encouraged to integrate contextualized OCB frameworks, including culturally salient dimensions such as conformity, into performance management systems, ensuring that commitment translates into sustainable organizational value without compromising psychological health.

In conclusion, effective engagement management in constrained contexts requires a dual approach: leveraging structural levers—justice, procedural fairness and relational levers—supportive, empowering leadership—while remaining attentive to potential latent burnout, thereby promoting a sustainable equilibrium between organizational performance and employee well-being.

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